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ABSTRACT

In response to requests of adult students for foreign language instruction for their kindergarten and elementary school aged children, and after researching the availability of such instruction in the area, Tarrant County Junior College developed a series of nonsequential courses of 12 lessons each on common topics such as parts of the body, the family, the house, clothing, the beach, food, pets, the circus, and the professions that could be regrouped perodically so that students dropping out for a semester or more would be able to return with interest. Enrollment was limited to 15, and the courses were designed to suit the schedules of children and families. The emphasis was on listening comprehension and basic speech production. The materials development included production of "parent papers" to inform parents of each unit's content, and cassette tapes for students to take home. Spanish was the first language offered, and French and German were added within a few years. After 5 years, courses for junior high school students were added in all languages, and a course for students of a local private school and a conversational French practice course for high school students were also developed. The most difficult problem in the program's 10 years has been finding good teachers, and most of the instruction has been by part-time faculty. Other major considerations are scheduling and coordination of classes, providing materials and equipment, design of publicity, and student recruitment. (MSE)

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LANGUAGES FOR CHILDREN AT TARRANT COUNTY JUNIOR COLLEGE: A TEN-YEAR REPORT

Jane Harper

What a different situation this conference is than is customary for me when I am speaking about languages for children! I do not have to convince you that language skills are beneficial in our society and will be as valuable as gymnastics or football during the lifetime of our children. I do not have to persuade you that it is possible for young children to acquire communication skills in more than one language. I do not have to explain that fluency in a second language is not acquired in one month or in one semester or in one year. Probably I do not even need to defend the role of the junior college in assuming the responsibility of language instruction for children in its community. Rather, I can spend this hour with you in describing the ten-year history of our program of languages for children at Tarrant County Junior College Northeast Campus and in answering questions which may arise about our program.

First, let me give you a brief description of the college itself. Northeast Campus is one of three campuses of the TCJC District of the Fort Worth, Texas, metropolitan area. Student enrollment in credit courses

in the District is usually about 25,000 to 28,000, of which Northeast Campus generally enrolls from 10,000 to 11,000. The campus originally opened in 1968. During the ten-year period under consideration in this report, 1975-1985, the enrollment of the campus increased from 8700 to 10,000 while the enrollment in the Department of Foreign Languages grew from 559 to 1475 in credit courses. During that same period we also added non-credit offerings in languages which boosted department enrollment figures to 1750. One component of these non-credit offerings is the program of languages for children.

Since this is a ten-year report, I shall describe the development of the program on a year-by-year basis. The first year, 1975, was one of initial study and decision-making. Several of our adult students in French and in Spanish had asked me as department chair to consider offering courses for their children. With only four full-time faculty members, including myself, in the department offering three languages, the initial major hurdle (which would continue as a consistent insistent consideration) was to locate instructors who would be willing to spend the necessary time and energy and who would have the creative abilities to plan and develop and teach a new program. Two part-time faculty members agreed to work with me outside our regular hours and duties and remuneration.

We decided that our first requirement was to find out how much and what kinds of instruction in languages were available to the children of our community. We spent the rest of 1975 locating and visiting classes in languages for elementary children. There were not many in Tarrant County: two major, expensive private schools and a limited program in Spanish in a few schools in the Fort Worth Independent School District. There were no classes available in the suburban schools. The public school administrators explained that they could not offer languages, primarily due to budgetary constraints, commitment of time to other curricula, and lack of qualified faculty. If children in our community were to study languages, their instruction would have to be outside school hours, off school premises, and by other personnel. The community college would be ideal: classroom space, lab facilities, media equipment, teaching materials, and faculty would be available during the afternoons and summers, the time least utilized by the college, yet prime time for elementary children. We decided to develop a program.

In 1976 we planned the courses. Each course would consist of twelve classes of 50 minutes each, one per week during the fall and spring semesters, two per week during each summer term. Class size would be limited to fifteen students. We developed a course strategy based

on our anticipated student population, one expected to be basically unpredictable. Since classes would be scheduled during after-school hours, they would necessarily compete with piano lessons, dance classes, sports, and scouts. A child might be able to enroll during the fall, but not in the spring, but would like to return for a summer term. Another might attend only during the spring or summer. At every age group we could expect first-time enrollees. After a year or two we could also anticipate returning students in each class. After the initial offering there would probably be a mixture of novices and returnees in every class. Therefore, we developed a non-sequential series of twelve lessons based on common topics, such as parts of the body, the family, rooms of a house, clothing, the beach, foods, pet animals, the circus, professions, and others. By rotating or re-grouping the topics, using five or six each semester, returning students would not be bored nor would new students be overwhelmed by the material. For each topic the emphasis would be on listening comprehension of the spoken language and on speech production of basic vocabulary and simple phrases.

After the design of the courses was completed, the actual materials for teaching each unit were developed in 1977. Acknowledging the short attention span of young children, we planned eight to twelve separate

activities for each 50-minute class. Most activities required mediated instructional materials, with variety being important in capturing and holding student attention as well as in transmitting meaning and information. Most of the materials we created as slides, flash cards, flannel board characters, large posters, puppets, toys, pictoral worksheets, and tapes. In addition, we selected and recorded songs and designed games to reinforce the vocabulary of each unit. We also created a "Parent Paper" for each unit to inform parents of the vocabulary, stories, and songs being taught and an accompanying cassette tape for home use.

By 1978 we were ready for students. During the summer we offered the first classes in Spanish, one for children in grades kindergarten through third grade and one for children in grades four through six.

The following summer, 1979, we added French to the summer program. We had three classes in Spanish and two in French. That fall and the next spring we offered both French and Spanish classes during the after-school hours for the first time. By the time the first French class was offered, my part-time instructor who had offered to work with the program had moved, and I did the teaching myself. The following year the Spanish teacher temporarily retired to have a baby, and the on-going search for teachers began.

By 1981 we had enough repeating students that we needed additional teaching units. Since our original twelve units were working well, we used the same format to create materials on ten more topics, such as a trip to the hospital, the kitchen, a toy store, a gift, transportation, and a city street. That year we added a second summer semester to our schedule of offerings for a total of nine classes during the summer. Our fall and spring semesters continued to enroll a total of three or four sections in French and Spanish.

In 1982 we added German to the curriculum. After an initial course taught by a full-time department faculty member, another instructor, a German native and former TCJC student who had subsequently completed a graduate degree, was added to our part-time faculty.

In the summer of 1983, we added courses for junior high school students in French, German, and Spanish. All three languages continued to be available for grades K-6 throughout the year, fall, spring, and two summer terms. After having had a stable, but small, enrollment in the after-school program since the fall of 1979, the enrollment jumped during 1983-84 with nine classes that fall, eleven that spring, and seventeen the following summer. Also during this period we taught our first section open for enrollment only to a special group, second-grade students from a private school who were

bused to campus during the school day two days a week for Spanish. Another new class was one for senior high school students who wanted extra conversation practice in French.

During the spring of 1985, the program is continuing to grow and develop. We are offering Italian for the first time. We have three Spanish classes being taught "in-house" in the Children's Center on campus during the morning hours, their regular school hours. We have our first off-campus Spanish class in a private school during their regular school day. At the senior-high level, we have added Spanish and German to our conversation classes. We offered a total of eighteen sections, by far our largest number of classes in a single semester.

During these ten years of apparent progress, all the progress has not been easily achieved. The most difficult problem is the constant requirement for good teachers. Although four of the five current full-time faculty have taught at least one course in the program, with fifty to sixty sections offered annually, most of the instruction is provided by part-time faculty. As many as eight to ten different teachers are employed each semester for the children's program. Locating, recruiting, and training fluent, experienced, enthusiastic teachers is essential for the success of

the program. Other major considerations are appropriate scheduling of classes, coordination of the classes, scheduling of equipment and materials for classes, design of brochures and letters for publicity purposes, and availability of a department spokesman for meetings with parent groups. Recruitment of students is also essential, particularly during the early years of a new program.

Over a period of ten years, the program of foreign languages for children at TCJC Northeast Campus has grown from an idea to a project to an experiment to an established year-'round program of four annual semesters of French, German, Spanish, and Italian for children between the ages of four and eighteen with a total annual enrollment of 500 students. Although the next few years are still in the idea stages, we are considering some additions to the program, such as workshops for teachers on materials development and use, summer courses in Latin for high school students, and extension of our off-campus offerings into other private elementary schools.

Perhaps with the new Texas state requirement for the teaching of foreign languages "to the extent possible" in all Texas public high schools, a growing awareness by the public of the need for languages for younger children will develop and will create additional

demands for language instruction at the elementary level. In that case, Tarrant County Junior College will have a faculty experienced in curriculum development, materials design, and instruction in languages for children to assist in the development of instruction for children in the public sector. Our ultimate goal is to be run out of the business of providing language courses for children by the universal offering of such programs in the public elementary schools of our community.